

PROFESSOR GREENE ON WRITING
Tips of the Sociological Trade



WHAT DO I WANT?

- ▶ **Well-written papers.**
 - ▶ I want to engage your **brilliant ideas**; not **line-edit your papers!**
 - ▶ A 5-page paper should take me **20 minutes** to read and grade, including comments.
 - ▶ Average time to grade 2202's Place Profiles: **45 minutes!**
 - ▶ I want a paper with a **focused, clear thesis (argument, takeaway)** that you develop throughout the paper.
 - ▶ I want a paper where each paragraph develops an aspect of your argument. **ONE MAJOR IDEA** per paragraph.
 - ▶ I want a paper in which I can summarize your argument in no more than two sentences.

WEAK VS. STRONG VERBS

- Forms of weak verbs (“to be”) can help create subtle distinctions of agency, action, and tense.
 - e.g. “I was made to feel inferior.” (different from “She made me feel inferior.”)
 - e.g. “I was going shopping.” (different from “I go shopping.” or “I shopped.”)
- Excessive use of weak verbs (“to be”) invite sloppy syntax.
 - e.g. “What is interesting about these data is the fact that Portland, Maine saw an increase of African Americans over the last twenty years.
 - instead: These data reveal an increase of African-American residents in Portland, Maine within the last twenty years.
- **RULE:** Limit your use of weak verbs to no more than two per paragraph.

MODIFYING AND ABSTRACTING GOOD VERBS

- Sometimes, weak verbs transform good action verbs into modifiers.
 - e.g. “The data *are describing*” instead of “The data *describe* . . .”
 - e.g. “The town *was risking* . . .” instead of the “The town *risks* . . .”
 - e.g. “The land *was discovered* by white people . . .” instead of “White people *discovered* the land.”
 - e.g. “Los Angeles *is bordered by* . . .” instead of “Los Angeles *borders* . . .”
 - e.g. “New York *was struggling* economically by the mid-1970s . . .”

PASSIVE VOICE VS. ACTIVE VOICE

- ▶ Passive voice removes agency an action from a sentence.
 - ▶ e.g. Native Americans were forced out of the territory by Dutch settlers in 1910.
 - ▶ Dutch settlers forced Native Americans out of the territory in 1910.
 - ▶ e.g. I was impressed by the way Professor Greene called me out on my writing.
 - ▶ The way that Professor Greene called me out on my writing impressed me.

USE OF WEAK VERBS/PASSIVE VOICE

- ▶ **RULE:** You should not use more than two weak (be-) verbs per paragraph.
- ▶ **RULE:** Unless you are writing a mystery (which you are not doing in any of my classes!), always use the active voice in writing.

USE OF CONTRACTIONS

- ▶ **RULE:** Unless used in dialogue, **do not** use contractions in a formal paper you submit for me.
 - ▶ Analytic papers require a formal tone; contractions
 - ▶ Students often mistake contracted forms for possessives.
 - ▶ It's/its; their/they're/there
 - ▶ e.g. Augusta's city council passed it's ordinance in 2010.
- ▶ Make it easy on yourself. It does not take any longer to write "it is" or "do not" than it does to write "it's" or "don't."

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

- ▶ The word "data" is the plural form of datum. It takes a plural verb.
 - ▶ The data **reveal** that African Americans
 - ▶ **These data reveal**
- ▶ The word "phenomena" is the plural form of "phenomenon." It, too, takes a plural verb.
 - ▶ **These phenomena illuminate** . . .
 - ▶ **This phenomenon**
- ▶ Beware of prepositional and modifying phrases between subjects and modifying verbs. The verb should agree with the subject, not the prepositional phrase.
 - ▶ **The windows of the world are covered in rain.**
 - ▶ **The reading that the professors describe is available online.**
- ▶ **BUT**, as a general rule, the subject and verb should not be too far from each other in a sentence anyway.

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Since 1997, unlike the West Side, the East Side has been consistently gerrymandered, thereby restricting the development of organizational infrastructure for acquiring and distributing resources to East Side blocks. Gangs fought with police to maintain drug operations and control over residents eventually creating a code of silence. What can members of the East Side do collectively to mitigate violence in their community?

—YADIRA C., EXPERT QUESTION

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In 2009, CPS received \$260 million from President Obama's federal stimulus legislation, of which \$40 million was allocated to create one of the largest and most expensive violence reduction initiatives in the city's history: the Culture of Calm. The Culture of Calm established a mentoring program and a crossing guard program called Street Watchers. However, nothing was done for the East. How can the government better serve the residents of East Little Village?

—YADIRA C., EXPERT QUESTION



A recurring pattern we have observed in marginalized, poor, and mostly non-White communities is the existence of intra-group conflict -- specifically, due to the "good" attempting to distinguish themselves from the "bad." On Monday, Professor Medford described the perception of "deserving" versus "undeserving" immigrants by both natives and immigrants. In Golden Valley, those with work ethic or moral capital used it to separate themselves from those with poor coping habits and those on governmental support. We also witness this dichotomy in Los Angeles. Due to the city's *conditional* police enforcement and competition at work, there is a motive for "good" immigrants to separate themselves from those who are lazy, drink, and "act Mexican/Indian."

Is it fair for "good" immigrants to place blame on the "bad" for unemployment or deportations? Should it be "good" immigrants' responsibility to help others assimilate? How can ally non-profits intervene to disrupt this good/bad binary?"

—Brandon L., Expert Question



Connecting the lecture from Professor Medford and chapter 2 of Undocumented Politics, the "good" minority and the "bad" minority argument seems to set the scene for whether immigrants feel appreciative or cynical towards the United States "Good" and "Bad" behavior is a very arbitrary way to describe threats to violence and deportation. Andrews states immigrants who feel appreciative towards the US as distancing themselves from their indigenous roots to feel "whiter" and take advantage of opportunities in the United States. Even though many are still illegal immigrants, why do these people feel their behavior has an influence on their fates? Does this change their view on law enforcement? On their freedom? Why?

—Matt N., Expert Question
